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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAMAKO 000504

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PINS PINR PREL PTER ML

SUBJECT: MALI FINDS NEW ALLIES AGAINST AQIM

REF: A. BAMAKO 445

¶B. BAMAKO 460

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Peter Henry Barlerin, Embassy Bamako,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) Embassies Algiers and Tripoli have cleared on this message.

¶2. (C) Summary: During a pause in Mali's offensive against Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Malian President Amadou Toumani Toure (ATT) has been active in lining up new allies for that fight. On the margins of a conference in Bamako on implementation of the Algiers Accords, the Malian government secured from the Tuareg rebel group Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC) a commitment to form special units of former rebel soldiers to pursue AQIM, and at the recent African Union Summit in Libya and the meeting of Non-Aligned nations in Egypt, ATT announced having secured new commitments from Libya and Algeria to share military equipment and intelligence. Meanwhile, France has donated 28 trucks to the Malian Army fulfilling a previous commitment. These recent developments on the diplomatic front make clear that ATT and the Malians are pursuing multiple alliances in the fight against Al Qaeda. End Summary.

Taking a Breather (To Make Friends)

¶3. (SBU) During the recent Non-Aligned Nations conference, ATT announced to the government newspaper, L'Essor, that Malian forces had suspended their active military operations against AQIM and had returned to their principal forward operating bases in Timbuktu and Tessalit. ATT indicated that the pause was due to the start of the rainy season, which negatively impacted maneuverability and raised dust in the air, reducing visibility. The AQIM ambush on July 4 that killed more than 20 Malian troops may have also influenced ATT to consolidate Malian military positions prior to pressing forward (see reftels).

¶4. (SBU) During the meeting of Non-Aligned nations in Sharm-el-Sheikh, and at an earlier African Union summit in Libya, ATT spoke with Libyan leader Mouammar Kadhafi and Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Press reports indicate ATT secured new commitments from Libya and Algeria to share both military resources and intelligence with Mali in their joint efforts against AQIM.

New Focus on the Algiers Accords

¶5. (C) Representatives of the Malian government and the Tuareg rebel group Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC)

met the weekend of July 18-19 in Bamako to discuss the status of implementation of the Algiers Accords, originally signed July 4, 2006. Algerian Ambassador to Mali Abderkrim Gheraieb facilitated the meeting. The meeting reviewed recent progress towards the implementation of the accords, including the upcoming launch of a much-anticipated socio-economic reintegration program for former rebels. A ceremony officially inaugurating the reinsertion program took place July 25 in Kidal.

¶6. (C) As Mali re-engages its northern regions, the Tuareg rebels have agreed to assist the Malian government in its fight against Al Qaeda. Specifically, the ADC has agreed that special "mixed" units of former Tuareg rebels under the command of Malian officers can be used to track and hunt down AQIM forces in northern Mali. Such "mixed" units were anticipated by the Algiers Accords but not yet implemented. It is still unclear if the agreement to use mixed units to pursue AQIM will overcome the government's reluctance to fully integrate former rebels into the military. However, the agreement could provide a powerful incentive for the Malian government to do so, as the Tuareg rebels - like AQIM - possess an intimate knowledge of the north's terrain, and the ability to operate effectively in the harsh desert environment. More than one Embassy source has expressed the view that only the Tuaregs are capable of chasing AQIM from Malian territory, reflecting doubt that the Berabiche Arabs currently allied with the government will provide a sustainable effort against AQIM.

The French Deliver on a Commitment

BAMAKO 00000504 002 OF 002

¶7. (SBU) On July 16, France presented Malian Minister of Defense Natie Pleah with 28 all-terrain vehicles to reinforce the capabilities of Malian troops. As previously reported, the Malian army is woefully underequipped, and the French contribution meets one of the Malians' more pressing needs (Ref B). The vehicles fulfill a previous commitment to the Malians by the French and are in addition to 12 Land Rovers provided in 2008.

Comment:

¶8. (C) Recent developments on the diplomatic front make clear that ATT and the Malians are pursuing multiple alliances in the fight against Al Qaeda. The threat from AQIM has evidently also created a powerful incentive for Mali to live up to its commitments to the Tuaregs under the Algiers Accords. Mali looks to the United States for support and training, but is leaving no other stones unturned in its search for support and allies in the region and internationally.

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